

A Qualitative Test of Ogbu's Theory of Cultural Ecology : Does the Theory hold for
All Voluntary Immigrants?

By Sorie Gassama

1/13/2012

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Introduction

John Ogbu, the legendary educational anthropologist held a commanding respect in educational research. He made a huge impact on educational research and especially so on educational anthropology. Ogbu coined or put together the cultural ecology theory which specifically dealt with minority student performance. In this theory, Ogbu discussed the 'institutional patterns of behavior interdependent with the physiognomies of the surroundings' (Ogbu 1990a, p. 122). Ogbu's cultural ecology theory of student performance:

Emphasizes that there are two sets of factors influencing minority

School performance: how society at large and the school treats

Minorities (the system) and how minority groups respond to those

treatments and to schooling (community forces). The study

additionally pinpoints that the differences in school performance

between immigrant and nonimmigrant minorities are in some cases

due to differences in their community forces (Ogbu, 1999, p. 156)

Ogbu in his CE theory found it necessary to single out between three 'different kinds of minorities' (1983a, p.168; 1985, p. 186). Of the three, Ogbu laid emphasis only on the two groups he classified as voluntary and involuntary minorities. According to Ogbu's CE theory, voluntary minorities are those who perform well in school, and involuntary minorities are those who perform poorly. The two types of minorities according to Ogbu varied in their views of educational institutions regarding (1) how it helps them in their endeavors to make it in society, (b) how far can the educational institutions and those who head them be relied upon to provide them with the right education, (c) the role schooling play in affecting their language and cultural identity based upon how they got to this country. How they were treated in this country influence their beliefs in how far the educational credentials can help them to achieve.

Voluntary minorities are those who came to the United States out of their own volition. They believe that by doing so, (a) they are capable of succeeding in the United States than in their own countries (b) that education is an important route for succeeding in the United States than "back home" where the family that one was born into and how much you are loved by the powers that be are basically what help one to succeed, and not how much educated one is (c) that they have to overcome cultural and language barriers for them to succeed (d) additionally, voluntary immigrants tend to trust the educational institution and the administrators. Consequently, voluntary minorities work very hard in school and in every aspect of their lives and generally succeed in their endeavors.

Involuntary minorities on the contrary, who were brought to the United States against their own volition either by way of conquest or slavery, and have gone through discrimination view the situation differently. (1) they believe that while school credentials and hard work may

be necessary, they are not all what minorities need to succeed, (2) they believe that by crossing the cultural and language boundary in the school context, they will lose their minority identities, (3) because of the relationship that exist between them and their white American counterparts, they distrust the schools and don't believe that the schools can help educate their children (4) involuntary minorities believe they are worse off not only because of their minority status, but because unlike the voluntary minorities, they do not have a 'back home' with which to compare. Because of these, involuntary minorities are uncertain about schooling, refuse to embrace school standards that are equal to white ways. They do not appear to work hard in school and thereby do poorly compared to their voluntary minority counterparts.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study:

1. To investigate the academic success rate of recent voluntary minorities from Liberia living in Houston, and to examine the reasons why Voluntary Liberian Minorities are being successful or unsuccessful in school.

Liberia, which means "land of the free," was founded by freed slaves from the United States in 1820. These freed slaves, called Americo-Liberians, first arrived in Liberia and established a settlement in Christopolis now Monrovia (named after U.S. President James Monroe) on February 6, 1820. This group of 86 immigrants formed the nucleus of the settler population of what became known as the Republic of Liberia(Wikipedia, retrieved, June 5, 2010)

The Liberian civil war began in 1986 and ended in 1996. The war which was waged by Charles Taylor, a former Samuel Doe ally saw a lot of Liberians leaving the country as refugees to neighboring Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Ivory Coast (Carl, 1996.) Most of

these refugees were later resettled in western countries particularly the United States of America. The many that settled in the Houston metropolitan area formed the subject of my study.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the factors associated with the academic performance of recent Liberian minority refugees in Houston ?
2. How do recent Liberian minority refugees compare to Ogbu's voluntary minorities in his Cultural Ecology Theory?
3. Do the academic performances of recent Liberian refugees completely refute Ogbu's belief of the successful voluntary minorities in his CE Theory?

Review of Literature

A Brief Look at Immigration to the United States

The United States remains home to millions of immigrants. An 1820 census showed that an estimated 70 million people had arrived in the country in the past 200 years principally from Europe, Latin America, and Asia (Brownston & Frank, 2001). It was recorded that only one person emigrated to the U.S. from Africa at the same time. An estimated 16 more arrived throughout the following decade (Brownston & Frank, 2001). As time went by, the number of immigrants entering the United States continued to soar until the 1960s, when the Hart-Cellar Immigration Reform Act of 1965 ended the discriminatory national origin quota system (NOQS). This act paved the way for more foreign-born people from Africa, Europe, Latin America, and Asia to enter the United States.

Immigration into the United States has grown steadily since the 1820s. From 1820 to 1996, the United States population numbered 265, 557,000. Of this number 38 million migrated from Europe; 16.2 million came from the Americas, 630 from Africa (those who came as slaves not included), 7.9 million from Asia, 241,000 from Oceania (Australia included), and 268,000 from places not specified (Brownston & Franck, 2001).

Immigration and naturalization documents reveal that between 1971 and 1980 about 80,779 Africans lived in the United States. The majority came from Nigeria, Egypt, Liberia, and Ghana, having escaped political, economic, religious, educational, and ethnic warfare. The U.S. Refugee Act of 1980 established clear conditions and procedures for refugee admission and reduced the nationwide ceiling for immigrants from 290,000 to 270,000 (Bogen, 1987; Szucs & Luebking, 1997). Because of this legislation two-thirds of all Africans residing in the United States came after 1980 (AIME, 1998). According to the U.S. Census, 176,893 African immigrants arrived in the United States between 1981 and 1990 (Brownston & Franck, 2001).

The Diversity Visa Lottery Program Act of 1992 interfered with the immigration disparity. It paved the way for more Africans to come to the United States. Africans were still in small numbers considering the immigrant population as a whole; Africans made up only 6% of this total population. According to African Immigration in the Modern Era, two reasons accounted for this; the first was the difficulty faced by Africans in acquiring visas when they tried to emigrate to the United States, with the exception of a small number of students who had gained acceptance to institutions of higher learning and those exiled by the apartheid regime in South Africa. Another reason was that the journey from Africa to the United States was so expensive that many African families could not afford it (AIME, 1988).

Regardless of these setbacks, Africans have migrated legally and illegally. The largest African groups in the United States are Nigerians, Sierra Leoneans, Ghanaians, Liberians, Ethiopians, South Africans, Moroccans, Somalis, Egyptians, Sudanese, Senegalese, and Kenyans. In small numbers are Ugandans,

Cameroonians, Algerians, Angolans, Libyans, Malians, Guineans, and Malagasy (AIME, 1988). Included in the immigrant population count are people from smaller countries like Mauritius, the Gambia, Togo, and Lesotho. Many from these countries came for the sole purpose of studying, but have decided to stay permanently because of personal reasons. Most of them originally planned to study, return to their homelands and help with the rebuilding process, but changed their minds because of political instability in parts of Africa (Nyang, 1998).

The desire for decent lives has attracted refugees, asylees, and immigrants to the United States with the belief that life was relatively stable when compared to that in their countries of origin. They were attracted by political stability, humanitarian concerns, economic and educational opportunities as well as legislative moral codes (Brownston & Franck, 2001). Added to these, other conditions that have inspired them to migrate were inflation, high unemployment rates, failed or barely existent social service networks, and financial crises. Most considered the United States as the best alternative (Brownston & Franck, 2001 p.27).

The United States' prosperity has always made the country desirable to immigrants from Africa. The Immigration Act of 1990 increased the allotment of immigrants into the United States per year to 700,000. Brownston and Franck (2001) reasoned that the United States had strong economic growth, accompanied by low unemployment and a stock market boom and was largely able to accommodate the wave of new immigrants during the 1990s. According to census indication, in 1990 alone 363,819 African-born individuals came to the United States, lagging behind 4,350,403 Europeans, 4,979,037 Asians, and 8,407,837 Latin Americans. The number of African-born who came to the United States in 1990 nearly doubled the census count for all African immigrants from 1981 to 1990.

The U.S. Census Bureau in 2000 indicated that the foreign-born population had reached 28.4 million. Of this number, 32.2% had resided in the United States for 20 years or more and 0.7 million of these were African- born, with a median residency of 10.2 years. This residency figure for Africans is low when

compared to 25.0 years for Europeans, 13.5 years for Latin Americans, and 14.3 years for Asians. In 1991, an additional one million immigrants were admitted into the United States, of whom approximately 53,948 Africans were immigrants and 19,070 were refugees. Other nationalities that came to the United States in that year included Asians (347,776), Europeans (175,371), Caribbeans (103,546), and South Americans (68,837).

After the World Trade Center terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, United States immigration was restricted. Despite this restriction, the number of refugees has been on the increase, especially from war ravaged Liberia⁵. The 2000 census showed a surge in the United States population to an all time high of 281.4 million with 28.4 million foreign born being immigrants. The number of immigrants, refugees, and asylees has varied and cannot be accurately determined until the next census count in 2010. Indubitably, the United States population growth has an impact on and greatly enriches the diversity of the American population.

A Focus on African Immigration and Settlements in Houston

At the African Knowledge Networks Forum (AKNF) that took place in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa, in October of 2001, Chikezie (2001) stated

Cities such as Paris, London, New York, or Houston have long played the role of meeting place or melting-pot for Africans with differing backgrounds. Through shared experiences and collective struggles, new pan-African identities and sensibilities have been forged (p.4).

A 2000 census indicated that although a substantial number of African immigrants lived in the northwestern United States and although New York had the largest population, the Houston African population was growing at a tremendous rate. This growth in particular results from the fact that Africa

has recently been engulfed in endless political turmoil which led many Africans to seek refuge in western countries to avoid persecution. This is particularly true of Africans in countries like Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Rwanda, which have gone through decades of civil war. Most recent African immigrants are refugees that came to the western world under programs commonly known as “resettlement.”

When these refugees arrived in the United States, France, or England, they automatically, became citizens theoretically with all rights and privileges of the host country. These refugees must work and repay the costs of their air fares. Of these African immigrants who have come to the United States since 1990 other than those refugees under the resettlement program, 90% have not been able to become citizens because immigration laws in the United States continue to be reviewed (ASC, 2003).

In the United States the upsurge in the African population began in 1965, when an immigration act was established that cleared the way for African immigrants to join their relatives who were themselves legal immigrants as citizens or permanent residents in the United States (ASC, 2003.) Today many Africans, including Sierra Leoneans, Malians, Liberians, Nigerians, Gambians, Guineans, Ethiopians, Chadians, Senegalese, Ivorians, and Burkinabes live in Houston. Houston, like other cities, has growing support services for Liberians. These include the Organization of Liberians, which serves the interest of all Liberians. In addition, there are other organizations with tribal affiliations, An example is the Mandingo Organization that caters especially for people from the Mandingo tribe.

Liberian Immigration to Houston

Because Liberia was an American colony, Liberians had a stronger tie with America than with Britain. The United States offered more accessible educational, humanitarian, and economic opportunities than Canada and Britain that attracted Liberians to Houston and elsewhere. Sassen (1991) has argued that the high levels of immigration to the United States from other developing or underdeveloped countries

correlated closely with the increase in direct investment by United States companies in those countries in the 1970s and 1980s.

Although the redeployment of manufacturing and office work to less developed countries has contributed to conditions that promote emigration from these countries, the concentration of servicing and management functions in global cities has contributed to conditions for the demand and absorption of the immigrant influx in cities like New York, Los Angeles and Houston. The same set of basic processes that has promoted emigration from several rapidly industrializing countries has also promoted immigration into several booming global cities (Sassen, 1991).

The number of Liberian immigrants residing in Houston has increased tremendously in the past several years. This increase has been due to the resettlement program which brought hundreds of Liberian refugees to Houston from 1991 to 2005. How they have fared academically is the subject of this study.

Method

This research focused on the academic performance of recent Liberian minorities in Houston, the factors associated with their academic performance, and how much they measure up to Ogbu's successful voluntary minorities in his CE Theory.

Research Setting

The research was conducted within the Houston metropolis inhabited by many recent Liberian Voluntary minorities (Refugees). Being an African, I decided to base this study on recent Liberian minorities because of my having lived in Houston for some time and having seen the cosmopolitan center go through tremendous change. Houston is inhabited by people from different backgrounds. This city has been a stop for a great many people who come and

go. Liberian minorities live everywhere in the city. This study focused on recent Liberian minority refugees.

This group is rarely studied as it does not embody a major group. From a study of this group, educational leaders, and governmental and non-governmental organizations may get valuable insight about recent Liberian minority refugees that will help them put together interventions to help them succeed in the academic arena.

Research Method and Data

In qualitative research understanding the social construction of meaning is important. Qualitative researchers are primarily interested in knowing the meaning people have of their world and their own experiences in the world (Frankel and Wallen, 2006). The qualitative design used allowed for an understanding of refugees' experiences from their own perspectives.

This qualitative descriptive study used guided interviews and observations of participants. It captured participants' experiences, their academic and social achieve.

The participants' understanding and impressions of their academic and social accomplishments were garnered through the use of interviews with well structured questions. These solicited authentic responses and in-depth understanding of the human and non human factors that propelled the participants in their academic and social endeavors.

The interviews were also a means of describing and examining participants' academic and social mobility as well as their contributions to education. McMillan and Schumacher (1984) stated that "The purpose of most descriptive research is limited to characterizing something as it is: There is no manipulation of treatment of subjects. The researcher takes things as they are" (p.315).

Instrument

Several research techniques were used in the Data collection. Participant observation was the primary data collection method. I did my best to participate in all public and private Liberian events that I knew about. In all of them my participants were quite visible. Visits, interviews and observation of research participants in their residences for two to three hours showed certain behaviors that might have impacted the academic success of the participants.

Observations and interviews were conducted in the evenings or on weekends while participants went about their daily activities, and their activities were recorded. I let the subjects know that I was a researcher. I kept a journal during the data collection.

My observation was naturalistic as subjects of the study were observed in their natural settings. I made no effort to control what the participants did. I observed and kept written records of what happened as things naturally occurred.

The Sample

A convenient sample of 10 recent Liberian refugees was selected. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), this approach “saves time, money and effort” (p.28). Ages of participants ranged from 20-30 years. The identities of all those who participate in a qualitative study should always be protected: care should be taken to ensure that none of the information collected would harm them (Frankel & Wallen, 2006). Pseudonyms were assigned to each research participant. They were treated with respect. I told them of my interest in conducting

the research and asked for their permission to proceed. I asked for their permission for all recordings done during the interviews and guaranteed that neither physical nor psychological harm would come to them as a result of participation in the study. The participants were selected based on their length of stay in Houston. Participants were all refugees who recently were resettled in Houston.

Data Analysis

Collecting data and analyzing them can be ponderous, heavy, and weighty tasks with immeasurable observational notes, audiotapes, and other furnishings. They, however, will allow for precise recording that will make vivid participants' stories. Once recorded, the tapes were played often for continued study and analysis. In this way, others concerned could hear or see what the researcher had observed and heard and give their perceptions. I also kept a journal and took notes during the interviews. Note taking aided in the formulation of new questions during the interviews. This was important when it came to double checking something that had been said earlier. Noting what was said also made later analysis manageable, like finding significant quotations from the tape. English was the medium of communication. With the use of Atlas-ti 5.0 software materials including research questions and websites were organized, coded, and triangulated according to topics, events, and person. The software sorted larger themes, which formed patterns and arrangements that permitted data contextualization.

Before beginning any analysis, I considered the quality of the data and proceeded accordingly. I reviewed the purpose of the evaluation and questioning. I identified the questions that I wanted my analysis to answer. I focused the analysis to look at how all individuals responded to each question. I organized the data by questions to look across all

respondents and their answers in order to identify consistencies and differences. Next, I categorized the information, or coded the data. I identified themes or patterns, and organized them into coherent categories. I assigned abbreviated codes of a few letters, words, or symbols and placed them next to the themes and ideas that emerged. This helped me organize the data into categories. I provided a descriptive label or name for the category I created. As I categorized the data, I came across other themes that served as subcategories. I continued to categorize until I had identified and labeled all relevant categories. I worked with emergent themes instead of preconceived ones. I read through the text and found the themes or issues that recurred in the data. These become my categories. This approach allowed the categories to emerge from the data.

I summarized the information pertaining to one theme or captured the similarities or differences in people's responses within a category by assembling all the data pertaining to a particular theme. To show what categories appear more important than others, I counted the number of times a particular theme came up. The repetition provided a rough estimate of the relative importance of a particular theme.

In interpreting the data, I started by developing a list of key points or important findings I had discovered as a result of categorizing and sorting my data. I thought about what those who viewed my data would be most interested in knowing. I developed an outline for presenting my result to other people or for writing a final report. I included quotes and descriptive examples to illustrate my points and to bring the data to life. I illustrated how all the pieces fit together using a diagram of boxes and arrows.

The study was mainly guided by the work of scholars including Appadurai, Basch, Schiller, and Blanc, Bond, Alisera, Foner, Gmelch, Hannerz, Malkki, Pessar, Piel, Owusu, Sharp, Ogbu, and Hirsch. These authors primarily studied transnationals living in bi-national or multiple worlds. The study also benefited from the work of African transnational researchers like Nyang who were enquiring into how Africans were adjusting and transforming outside of their home countries.

Findings

The main objectives of the study:

Was to investigate the academic success rate of recent voluntary minorities from Liberia living in Houston, and to examine the reasons why Voluntary Liberian Minorities are being successful or unsuccessful in school. The result from this study will provide educational leaders, and governmental, and non -governmental organizations with vital information needed that will in turn help them develop interventions for young school-age refugees with similar profiles.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study

1. Why did the Liberia refugees leave for Houston?
2. How do Liberian Refugees perform academically ?
1. What are the factors associated with the academic performance of recent Liberian minority refugees in Houston ?
2. How do recent Liberian minority refugees compare to Ogbu's voluntary minorities in his Cultural Ecology Theory?

3. Do the academic performances of recent Liberian refugees completely refute Ogbu's belief of the successful voluntary minorities in his CE Theory?

Before responding specifically to the research question, I find it fit to discuss the reason why the research participants came to the US, particularly to Houston. The study will focus only on those refugees who came from Liberia to Houston because of the civil war, and their academic performance.

Refugees in the 1990s and 2000s

The first Liberian Civil War began in 1989. The harsh dictatorial atmosphere that gripped the country was due largely to Samuel Doe's rule (Ellis, 2001). With the backing of neighboring countries like Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire, Charles Taylor an Americo-Liberian entered Nimba County with approximately 100 men (Ellis, 2001). His fighters took control of the country with the blessing of the population who were fed-up with the then government of Samuel Doe. At the same time, a new war lord also appeared on the scene: Yormie Prince Johnson who had organized his own army and had gained great support from both the Mano and Gio ethnic group (Hartung, 2005).

ECOWAS or the Economic Community of West African States put together a military task force to intervene in the conflict. The troops were largely from Nigeria, Guinea and Ghana (Hartung, 2005). Doe, while moving around with his personal staff was ambushed, captured, and killed by the Gio Tribe who were loyal to Prince Johnson.

By September 1990, Doe's men were in control of only the capital city, Monrovia and the outskirts of the city. To end the conflict after his death, the interim president resigned in 1994 handing power to the council of state. Taylor was elected president in 1997. His autocratic and

dysfunctional government led to the second civil war in 1999 (Ellis, 2001). The conflict intensified in 2003, and the fighting moved to the capital, Monrovia. This saw a lot of people escaping to neighboring countries like Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Ivory Coast from where they were resettled to first world countries. The bulk of these came to the United States of America. A large number of these refugees were resettled in Houston. How they have fared academically is the subject of this research.

On arrival to Houston, the refugees received help from local home groups, non-governmental organizations, and governmental agencies that provided them with housing, food stamps, and employment. Financial assistance lasted for at least six months, but ended sooner if the refugee found a job.

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Profile of Research Participant

Name	Classificatio	Agency	Reason for Leaving	Year of Arrival	Level of education On arrival	Level of education attained
Alex Bonga	Refugee	Catholic Chaity	War	1993	Ninth Grade	Tenth Grade
Salma Rajon	Refugee	Alliance	War	1993	Seventh Grade	Ninth
Darling Gbefu	Refugee	YMCA	War	1994	Seventh Grade	Ninth
Rosa Mamalay	Refugee	YMCA	War	2000	Eight Grade	Ninth
John Fambuleh	Refugee	Interfaith	War	1995	Eight Grade	Tenth
Mathew Jenkins	Refugee	Alliance	War	2001	Eleventh Grade	Eleventh Grade
Julius Magbana	Refugee	YMCA	War	1996	Seventh	Ninth
Joseph Galou	Refugee	Interfaith	War	2001	Twelfth Grade	Twelfth Grade
Jasmine Donga	Refugee	Catholic Charity	War	1993	Ninth Grade	Eleventh Grade
Christopher Jay	Refugee	Catholic Charity	War	1990	Tenth	Eleventh

Response to the Research Questions

At this point, I will respond specifically to the five research questions

Research Question 1. Why did the Liberian refugees come to Houston?

All of the ten research participants said that they came to Houston because of the civil war. They agreed that while they were brought here by different agencies, they were first resettled in different African countries before they were considered for resettlement. Though all of them wished that they were resettled in the United States of America, none among them knew they were going to be sent to the U.S.

After escaping from Monrovia, I was taken to Freetown by ECOMOG Soldiers. From Freetown, I was sent to Waterloo, a city roughly twenty five miles from Freetown. I lived there for several years, in the refugee camp of course. During this time, I was told that my case was being considered for resettlement. I saw many of my friends sent to Australia.

I prayed that they send me to the United States. My case worker was Ansumana Kpukumu. One day he told me that I was going to be interviewed for resettlement. "If you pass your interview, they will send you to USA." I could hardly control myself. That night, I didn't sleep. I prayed hard and God heard my prayers. I was sent to the United. S. Rajon (Personal Communications April, 2010).

I left because of the war. The rebels came to our village early one morning. They burned all our houses. They killed my parents together with my two

brothers. I was lucky to escape. When they came to our house, I was in the backyard. I ran into the bushes. I saw our house burning. I cried and I left. I walked for two weeks in the bushes. I fed on wild fruits, and drank from Ponds. Later, I came to Ivory Coast. I was sent to Ghana where I stayed for several years before I was sent here to Houston. R. Mamalay (Personal Communications, April, 2010).

Research Question 2. How do Liberian refugees perform academically?

All of the research participants came here with different levels of education, and have since achieved little or nothing academically. The three female participants, Darling, Rosa and Salma, have dropped out of school, have had babies, not holding jobs, and worst still not having any place they can call a home.

When the Rebel War began, I was in seventh grade. When in Sierra Leone as a refugee, I did not go to school. After I came to Houston, I started middle School, and went to high school. I didn't like it. It was hard getting up every morning. My teachers were "tripping" too. So I decided to quit school. My aunt was also giving me problems. She wanted to force me to go to school, I refused, and went to live with my boyfriend. Now I have a baby. R. Sajon (Personal communications, May, 2010)

Asked where the boyfriend was, and who helps her with the baby, she answered

"Oh, I don't know, he left. I get WIC and food stamps to help me with the baby"

Both Darling and Salma are facing similar circumstances. They both have babies, have been in trouble with the law, though they can't tell me why. Darling said that she had association with

gang members, and there was a time when she felt that was alright. They both don't believe in schooling.

John Fambuleh was in eight grade when he arrived. He dropped out of school in tenth grade.

School is boring. When I was coming to America, I thought that I
Could go to school and be very educated. But I changed my mind
When I got here. There was a time when I wanted to be a "Rapper."
I know school is good, but I believe that I can make it without school.
You can be very rich by singing or playing basketball. You don't have
to go to school to make it. J. Fanbuleh (Personal communications, April,
2010).

I left Lofa County in tenth grade. I spent a couple of years here in tenth grade.
Because of the conditions, I mean the teachers and administrators, I was
discouraged. In eleventh grade, I decided that it was enough. So I decided to
quite school. After, I was enrolled in a special school for new comers. The
Principal there was good. He did a lot to help me, but I just could not cope up
with school anymore. So I quite again. C. Jay (Personal communications, March,
2010).

Asked what he was engaged in doing at present, Christopher replied "I am making my living.
The rest you don't want to know." Christopher made it clear to me that he has been in trouble
with the law on several accassions, but wouldn't tell me why. I didn't press further.

Research Question 3. What are the factors associated with the academic performance of recent Liberian Immigrants in Houston?

While all ten participants expressed some type of distrust for the administrators, and dislike for their school teachers, some went further saying that on arrival, they got caught up in the Hip-Hop culture that they had so much admired while in Africa.

While I was in Liberia before the civil war break out, I used to watch Videos of American musicians like Snoopy-Dog, Fifty Cents, Beyonce Rehanna, you name it. I watched movies like Boys in the Hood, Bad Boys, Scar face etc. I thought all this was real and cool. Those things I saw in the Movies you can't do in Africa. After I arrived, I started braiding my hair, and doing other cool things, you know. I saw other students talking back to the teachers. I said to myself, "What a free country, you can't do this in Liberia." I started talking back to teachers, skipping classes, and refusing to turn in assignments. I even felt cool with bad grades. Finally, I dropped Out. M. Jenkins (Personal Communications, March, 2010).

I always watched the BET channel in Liberia before the war. This was a satellite program. I saw people in there with pierced ears, noses, lips, and tongues. I admired all the musicians I saw in there. I also watched violent black movies like Boys in the Hood. I admired the Hip-Hop culture. When I came to Houston, my primary focus was to join a local musical group and become a singer. I started hanging out in night clubs where I sometimes performed, and took part in dancing competitions. I skipped school a lot.

School to me was not a priority. When I am home, I spent time watching television. I lived with my parents who tried to get me to study. I refused to study because I hated books. I kept on failing, and had to finally drop out of school. J. Magbana (Personal communications, April, 2010).

I loved the Hip-Hop culture a lot. In fact, I had always hoped to come to America and become a Hip-Hop artist. In Africa I was an excellent student. I made excellent grades in all my classes, and always got a lot of awards. At first, I thought of earning my doctoral degree, and becoming a Professor. When the war break out and I was resettled in Houston, I Thought that I was close to my goal of becoming the Hip-Hop artist that I had always dreamed of becoming. When I found that impossible, I turned to basketball. I skipped school every day, and played basketball in a nearby park with my friends. I thought “Why go to school, if you can play basketball, go to the NBA and become a millionaire? Soon, I dropped out of school. At present, I am doing nothing. A. Bonga (Personal communications, April, 2010).

Research Question 4. How do recent Liberian minority Refugees compare to Ogu’s Involuntary Minorities in his Cultural Ecology Theory?

To answer this question, I find it very necessary to go back and discuss Ogbu’s CE Theory, before looking at how the recent Liberian refugees fit into this category.

Ogbu in his CE theory found it necessary to single out between three 'different kinds of minorities' (1983a, p.168; 1985, p. 186). Of the three, Ogbu laid emphasis only on the two groups he classified as voluntary and involuntary minorities. According to Ogbu's CE theory, voluntary minorities are those who perform well in school, and involuntary minorities are those who perform poorly. The two types of minorities according to Ogbu varied in their views of educational institutions regarding (1) how it helps them in their endeavors to make it in society, (b) how far can the educational institutions and those who head them can be relied upon to provide them with the right education , (c) the role schooling play in affecting their language and cultural identity based upon how they got to this country. How they were treated in this country influence their beliefs in how far the educational credentials can help them to achieve.

Voluntary minorities are those who came to the United States out of their own volition. They believe that by doing so, (a) they are capable of succeeding in the United States than in their own countries (b) that education is an important route for succeeding in the United States than "back home" where the family that one was born into and how much you are loved by the powers that be are basically what helps one to succeed, and not how much educated one is (c) That they have to overcome cultural and language barriers for them to succeed (d) additionally, voluntary immigrants tend to trust the educational institution and the administrators. Consequently, voluntary minorities work very hard in school and in every aspect of their lives and generally succeed in their endeavors.

Involuntary minorities on the contrary, who were brought to the United States against their own volition either by way of conquest or slavery, and have gone through discrimination

view the situation differently. (1) they believe that while school credentials and hard work may be necessary, they are not all what minorities need to succeed, (2) they believe that by crossing the cultural and language boundary in the school context, they will lose their minority identities, (3) because of the relationship that exists between them and their white American counterparts, they distrust the schools and don't believe that the schools can help educate their children (4) involuntary minorities believe they are worse off not only because of their minority status, but because unlike the voluntary minorities, they do not have a "back home" with which to compare. Because of these, involuntary minorities are uncertain about schooling, refuse to embrace school standards that are equal to white ways. They do not appear to work hard in school and thereby do poorly like their voluntary minority counterparts.

My research participants were voluntarily resettled in Houston and are therefore according to Ogbu "Voluntary Minorities." The question remains whether their personal characteristics or their outlook towards academia is in sync to those Ogbu attributed to his "Voluntary Minorities." As Voluntary minorities, they came to the United States out of their own volition, and believe that by doing so, (a) they are capable of succeeding in the United States than in their own countries (b) that education is an important route for succeeding in the United States than "back home" where the family that one was born into and how much you are loved by the powers that be are basically what helps one to succeed, and not how much educated one is. They also embody the belief that they have to overcome cultural and language barriers for them to succeed. Nevertheless the research participants despite their being Voluntary Minorities do not tend to trust the educational institution and the administrators.

Their limited success or no successes at all show that they do not work very hard in school and in every aspect of their lives and generally do not succeed in their endeavors.

All of the research participants agreed that they saw the United States as a place they can come to and succeed. However, they came to Houston and did not take schooling seriously. They all ended up dropping out of school, and in some cases in trouble with the law. Salma, Darling, Rosa, and Jasmine have all had babies out of wed-lock; have become rebellious, and live practically on the street. Like the Involuntary Minorities in Ogbu's CE Theory the participants believe that while it can help, education is not all that is needed to succeed. The participants seem to be a complete replica of the involuntary immigrants in Ogbu's Cultural Ecology Theory.

1. Research Question 5. Do the academic performances of recent Liberian refugees completely refute Ogbu's belief of the successful voluntary minorities in his CE Theory?

According to the responses of the research participants, and the level education they have attained since their arrival, one can safely agree that the academic performances of recent Liberian refugees completely refute Ogbu's belief of the successful Voluntary Minorities in his CE Theory. The participants are laid back, refuse to take their education seriously, because they distrust school administrators, and don't believe in education as the only way to make it, one can conclude that their academic performance completely refute Ogu's belief of the successful Voluntary Minorities in his Cultural Ecology Theory.

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. The purpose of this study was to investigate the academic success rate of recent voluntary minorities from Liberia living in Houston, and to examine the reasons why

Voluntary Liberian Minorities are being successful or unsuccessful in school. The result from this study will provide educational leaders, and governmental, and non - governmental organizations with vital information needed that will in turn help them develop interventions for young school-age refugees with similar profiles.

In his Shaker Heights ethnography, Ogbu bluntly considered the complaints of Black students in the Shaker school district that their administrators, counselors, and teachers did not 'care' (p. 257) as very insignificant. According to Ogbu, the concerns were out of place or pinpointed poor strategies for becoming academically successful. The evidence that Ogbu gathered from both parents and students made him conclude that in Shaker High Black students put all their attention on social relations and caring than academia. Ogbu wrote:

The strategies of non-immigrant minorities are overshadowed by their Emphasis on social relations and caring rather than the practical considerations that schools and teachers are experts who have useful knowledge, skills, and language to offer. They are mistrustful of teachers, and they feel alienated. (p.54)

There was no indication from students or adults that Blacks had a Pragmatic trust in the school system, teachers, and other school Authorities-that is they did not judge their teachers and schools Primarily as useful because they were experts who offered valuable Skills and information for their future. (pp. 70-71)

In Ogbu's opinion the Black students of Shaker High School ought to be more focused on the expertise, knowledge, and skills of their teachers that they could gain from than be concerned with how they are treated, and whether the schools and teachers care for them (p.53). In conclusion, Ogbu stipulated that students did not take their school work seriously 'partly because they did not evaluate their teachers and schools more in terms of expertise in useful knowledge and skills' (p.258).

This in its entirety is true about my research participants all of whom blame their teachers and school administrators for their not doing well in school or simply for their hating school. Like the students of Shaker High School, the participants misplaced concerns. Instead of viewing their teachers as useful tools that they could gain from for a brighter future, they focused on the blame game, while they committed academic suicide by cutting classes, looking down on teachers, refusing to complete assignments, and believing that Hip-Hopism was a means to an end.

While none of the research participants complained about peer influences as a factor that undermined their schooling, the fact that all of them looks upon schooling with disdain is enough to raise an eye brow. The fact that some of these participants hang together in all their cultural functions, and have similar attitudes towards schooling might suggest that to them 'being smart is not cool', that they all slacked off school because they did not want to be made fun of.. In Ogu's words 'students who were not doing well or were not interested in school usually used this tactic from discouraging their friends from doing school work and making good grades'(p.211). 'Peer pressure such as these contributed to what Ogbu termed 'effort disengagement' and 'low-effort syndrome' (p.17)

Like Ogbu's Voluntary Minorities, the research participants lacked parental involvement in their schooling, backed by the lack of good study skills. For those who have parents, the parents were illiterate, so that they could not intervene when their children brought in bad grades, could not become involved in school activities, and when they attended school meetings which they rarely did, they were often at a loss. Because they were either too old or not proficient in English, the parents of the research participants hardly ventured beyond the threshold of their living quarters. All the same, they could not give to their children the kind of guidance needed for academic success, because they themselves lacked the ability to read and write.

In conclusion, it is safe to agree that though the research participants fit Ogbu's description of Voluntary Minorities because they came here out of their own free will, their attitudes towards schooling are exactly those of the Involuntary Minorities. They distrust the schools and the authorities that run them, they refuse to attend classes, complete assignments, and feel it is cool not to be smart.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Authorities, governmental and non- governmental and school administrators should put in place needed interventions to help refugees and their parents when they arrive. This should involve counseling, and even schooling the parents in the English language. This way parents will feel comfortable to be more involved in their children's' education, because they are able to communicate with their teachers and other school authorities. The district should put counselors back in their traditional role of counseling instead of being master schedule makers. Counselors being more involved with students will go a long way to reduce truancy, and

dropout rates. Counselors, school administrators, and teachers must be well trained in other cultures. Understanding the cultures of other people will help make feel at home.

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